February 2004

Inside this issue

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UAAACT News

Utah Augmentative Alternative Assistive Communication and Technology Teams

Editor: Julie Brown
UAAACT Web Site: http://www.uaaact.org

The Wide Range of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Imagine how frustrating it is to know exactly what you want to say, but you cannot communicate your thoughts because of a speech impairment. Communication difficulties can stem from conditions including stroke, traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), autism, Down's syndrome, developmental delays, and other causes. The field of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) focuses on finding ways other than natural speech to improve communication success and decrease isolation and frustration caused by not having effective means of communication. AAC strategies range from simple communication boards to speaking through a communication device. Individuals of all ages can communicate using alternative communication devices or strategies. There are three basic categories of AAC devices: No-tech, low-tech, and high-tech.

No-tech

A no-tech approach to AAC does not use technology. Sign language, gestures, and eye-gaze are naturalistic examples of no-tech approaches. Sometimes no-tech approaches involve relaying messages using simple communication boards with alphabet letters, words, and phrases, or symbols and/or pictures representing specific messages. Individuals can use these types of boards to indicate their intent by pointing with a finger or pointer, looking at their selection, or participating in partner-assisted scanning. In the latter method, a partner points to each item or section on the communication board while the AAC user watches and then indicates his selection with a cue such as a head nod, gesture, or vocalization. These strategies are easily learned and simple methods of communication. Many users of low-tech and high-tech devices also have a simple communication board as a back-up system.

Low-tech

Low-tech AAC devices include digitized communication devices that store recorded messages retrieved by pushing a switch or button on the device. The number of stored messages varies from one-message devices, such as the BIGmack (AbleNet), to devices with multiple messages and multiple levels, such as the SuperHawk (AdamLab) or Tech/Speak (Mayer-Johnson). Low-tech communication devices generally feature whole word/whole message communication in which messages are represented by words and/or picture symbols. For example, a button may have a picture of a glass and/or the word "drink" which produces the recorded message "I'm thirsty" when pressed. Messages are geared towards social interaction and meeting everyday communication needs.

High-tech

High-tech AAC devices include a wide range of computerized devices featuring synthesized speech and multiple access methods such as pointing, single and dual-switch scanning, infrared pointer, and mouse/joystick. Synthesized speech allows full text-based communication. Individuals spell out messages and a computerized voice puts the text together and speaks it aloud. Programming frequently used messages for quick access customizes most high-tech devices. Some high-tech devices offer additional features, such as environmental controls, phone modules, and computer access. Common high-tech communication devices are DynaVox, DynaMyte, and DynaWrite (Sentient Systems), Pathfinder, Vantage, and Vanguard (Prentke Romich Company), and Portable IMPACT Tablet, Handheld and Palmtop (Enkidu). A personal computer can also be used as a communication device by installing communication software, such as EZ Keys (Words+) and Speaking Dynamically Pro (Mayer-Johnson).

Finding the best AAC approach is an individualized process because each person is unique with special needs to consider. When AAC is needed, the best place to start is with an AAC evaluation team. Together, the individual and AAC evaluation team can identify the AAC device and approach that works best for the user.

Individuals should try many different devices and approaches to be sure they have adequate information to make an informed device selection. When an appropriate AAC system is identified that matches an individual's unique needs, the possibilities for meaningful social interactions and successful communication are endless.

Popular AAC websites:

www.ablenetinc.com
www.mayer-johnson.com
www.dynavoxsys.com
www.prentrom.com
www.enkidu.net
www.words-plus.com
www.zygo-usa.com
www.adaptivation.com
www.adamlab.com
www.communicationaids.com
www.saltillo.com
www.creative-comm.com
www.lburkhart.com
www.box-talk.com
www.greattalkingbox.com
www.enablingdevices.com
www.isaac-online.org

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C-Sun March 17-20, 2004

C-Sun is rapidly approaching. If UAAACT members plan to attend a training event outside the State of Utah, they must submit a letter of support from their special education director/coordinator as per the UAAACT Policy and Procedure Handbook. There are funds for all team leaders to attend this conference. Other team members may attend by using money from the team's training budget. CSUN conference information has been sent to UAAACT members who have expressed an interest in attending this conference. If you need more information, see www.csun.edu/cod or contact Craig Boogaard.

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New UAAACT Equipment

Sixty-five new Start to Finish Books have been added to the UAAACT Central Inventory for you to checkout. These books on CD are wonderful reading tools. A complete listing of the titles is on the web at: www.uaaact.org You many want to contact The Computer Center to check on availability of a specific title.

For teams that make a specific request by contacting The Computer Center, we will give your team IntelliTools Classroom Pac and A Voiced Math Demo CD. To make your request, call or email Lynn Marcoux at 887-9380 (toll free 888-866-5550) or lmarcoux@utah.gov

Team Hours

Please keep track of all team hours and students served. These are the factors used for calculating the funding for your team equipment budgets. The forms are located at www.uaaact.org, and as an insert in this newsletter. Team leaders should send the Team Summary Report Form to Sue Lancaster by June 10, 2004. Her contact information is on the form.

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Protocol for Canceling Conference Registration

If you have registered for a conference paid for by the UAAACT project (such as the recent CAMA Tour) and are unable to attend, it is your responsibility to contact The Computer Center and your Team Leader as soon as possible. Once you have registered for a paid conference it is your responsibility to make every effort to attend. With prompt notification, The Computer Center may be able to get a refund for your slot or they may know of someone who could attend the conference in your place. It is imperative that once you know that you are not able to attend a conference that you make the notification as soon as possible. There are time restrictions for refunds and for obtaining a replacement. Also, if you have reserved a hotel room for a UAAACT related training, please make sure to cancel the hotel room to avoid wasting our training budget.

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Using Computers As an AAC Device

By Clyde Farnes, UAAACT Team D

With the constant upgrading of computers by our school districts, laptop and desktop computers are frequently being reassigned or retired. A money saving idea was brought to the forefront at a recent convention of the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) held in Chicago. Why not use some of these computers as communication devices to meet the needs of students within our schools? By installing the Speaking Dynamically Pro software from Mayer-Johnson a computer can be transformed into a communication device with a fixed or dynamic display and voice output.

The following modifications or additions to the laptop or desktop computer with Speaking Dynamically Pro installed could turn an old computer into an effective communication device.

Add an external touchwindow. The touchwindow control panel may include an option that makes the taskbar unavailable. Make this option active. Add an external speaker if one is needed for clear voice output. Use long lasting batteries or purchase an external battery to increase the length of time a laptop will last in battery mode. Make the taskbar unavailable to the student. Have the computer startup with Begin-IT or Speak-UP, which allows the computer to go directly into the Speaking Dynamically program when the computer is turned on. Cover the keyboard so that the attention of the student is on the screen.

Such communication devices could be used for assessment to determine which student would benefit from use of a device. It could also serve as a loaner again to determine whether a given student would be successful using the device before ordering one. In addition, it could be used as a loaner for the student to use while the long process of finding funding for a more expensive device is carried out.

Of great interest were computers by Fujitsu and Panasonic. These companies have come out with computers with built in touchscreens. These computers were demonstrated at the ASHA convention. The Fujitsu computers (www.fujitsupc.com) begin at about $1,100.00. These computers are small in size and weigh about three pounds. The Panasonic computers (www.panasonic.com) are larger and begin at about $4,000.00. The Panasonic CF-18 is a convertible laptop with a built-in touchscreen. The display panel can be rotated 180 degrees away from the keyboard, flipped and locked flat on top of the keyboard.

For further information, a copy of the handout from the ASHA convention with more details on how to transform a laptop or desktop computer into an AAC device is available from The Computer Center.

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UAAACT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Training Activities are at the Computer Center for Citizens with Disabilities, 1595 W. 500 South in Salt Lake City, unless other wise stated. Register for **Dynavox** workshops by calling Dynavox at 1-800-344-1778 ext 322. To register for all other workshops call the Computer Center at 877-9380 or toll free at 1-888-866-5550.

"Software Potpourri (Power Point and other great software)"	February 13, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm
"Speaking Dynamically Pro, Software Potpourri, and Low to mid tech AAC" Team I* Location in Grand or San Juan County; Exact location: TBA	February 19, Time: TBA
"Optical Character Recognition Software" Team I* Location in Moab, UT; Exact location: TBA	February 20, Time TBA
"Fabrication of Switch Technology" by Jim West	February 27 at 1:00 pm
Dynavox Training By Rick Archer	March 4, from 9:30 am to 2:30 pm
"AAC Devices Low Tech to Mid Range Products"	March 12, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm
"AAC Devices - High Range Products"	April 9, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm
"Making Curriculum Accessible"	May 6, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

* If you are interested in attending these workshops and are not on this team please contact CCCD to check on availability. UAAACT members may request specific AAC device training, training on computer access products or software training for their UAAACT team by calling Craig or Scott at CCCD.